



Statement of
The Honorable Martha B. Gould
Chairperson
National Commission on Libraries and Information Science (NCLIS)
January 10, 2002

With the President's signing of H.R. 3061, the Labor/HHS/Education appropriation, the uncertain future of the National Commission on Libraries and Information Science has been resolved.

The Administration's FY 2002 Budget had proposed no funding for NCLIS, thus eliminating the agency. The Congress has rejected this proposal (as two earlier Congresses had done with similar proposals) and it has provided \$1 million for the continuing operation of the Commission.

Nonetheless, this amount represents a significant reduction for the Commission; last year's funds totaled \$1.495 million. Understandably, the extraordinary costs following the attacks on September 11 make it necessary for all government agencies to tighten their budget belts.

Obviously, NCLIS will have to adjust its activities for the year and some of our worthwhile pursuits will have to be deferred for a while. However, we will continue our most important activities.

- We will not abandon our leadership role in the collection of statistics about libraries of all types or our participation in the development of library standards.
- We will continue to advance the cause of school libraries as an essential component of solid academic achievement.
- We will maintain our partnership efforts with UNESCO and the National Forum for Information Literacy to organize an international conference on information literacy.
- Notably, we will move forward with our newest project, prompted by the terrible losses of September 11th. NCLIS will endeavor to help libraries serve their communities as trusted sources of information during times of stress and uncertainty, better prepare for emergencies, and safeguard their unique information resources.

The Administration proposal to eliminate the Commission was disruptive, but not without its benefits. Any entity that works for the public owes an obligation to the public to account for its activities and to justify its continued operation, especially as the circumstances that led to its creation may be changing.

We welcome the opportunity to examine the role of NCLIS in the future, but question whether the appropriations route is the proper approach. The Commission was authorized through the deliberative action of the 91st Congress in 1969-70. If it were true that there is no further need for the independent advisory body that Congress designed—or if our functions were to be significantly changed or absorbed by another agency—it would be through the same legislative approach that such changes should be effected.

It should be noted that the principal statute dealing with federal library support, the Library Services and Technology Act, must be reauthorized this year. This legislative review provides an opportunity to examine the Commission at the same time. In this context, the Administration, the library community, and the American public (whose library and information needs the Commission was designed to represent) will have adequate opportunity to convey to the Congress their thoughts on the future role of NCLIS.

I want to personally express my appreciation to those Members of Congress who supported the continued funding for the Commission. I recognize that our budget is a microscopic part of a much larger appropriation. We do, after all, perform our work for less than a penny a year from each and every American. However, in the words of my predecessor, the late Jeanne Hurley Simon, from her testimony before our House Appropriations subcommittee in 1998: “I can assure you that the one million dollars entrusted to us is *real* money both to the American people and to us, and we take pride in the careful and effective manner in which we put it to use on their behalf.”

I also want to note my gratitude to the Congress for including funds for school libraries in the Labor/HHS/Education appropriation. Congress included in the recently passed education reform act a section entitled “Improving literacy through school libraries.” The appropriation bill provides a small down payment on this new program. More is needed, and we hope that our current examination of school libraries will provide information that the Congress will find persuasive in increasing support for school libraries.

Finally, I would like to call on President Bush to make appointments to the Commission. The terms of three Commissioners expire each year and we now have eight vacancies. I know a number of highly qualified individuals are seeking appointment, and I urge the White House to expedite their consideration. I also expect that the President will exercise his prerogative to name a new chairperson for the Commission, and I look forward to working with the new chair as I continue to serve the remainder of my current term as a Commissioner.

-end-